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Multilayered Authorship in Arabic Anecdotal Literature

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Reading an Arabic anecdote in an *adab* collection such as Ibn Qutayba's (d. 276/889) *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, or in a historical source, such as al-Masʿūdī's (d. 345/956) *Murūj al-dhahab*, one rarely stops to think about its author. One either takes the historical information of the anecdote to build a picture of the past, or analyses the structure of the anecdote or its place in the compilation or, finally, reads it for the cultural information the text may have. But rarely does one consider the question of authorship. This is, perhaps, mainly due to the anonymity of the anecdotes: the same material travels from one collection to another, often changing on the way, and it is difficult to point out any particular person as *the* author.

These anecdotes are usually studied either from a historical, literary or folkloristic viewpoint. The historians are either interested in teasing out the historical evidence or analysing the political and ideological motives of the author or, finally, in understanding the processes of transmission against the often implicit background of evaluating the reliability of the historical information.[1] Folklorists seem more interested in the meandering of motives from one source into another than in the impact of individual authors on them[2] and, finally, scholars working from the viewpoint of comparative literature are often more interested in the text itself than its authors.[3]

Stefan Leder, "Authorship," has spoken of early historical *akhbār* as unauthored literature. In a sense, he is, of course, right but that should not close our eyes to the fact that every text has, in another sense, one or several authors. The problem is that in early prose, we encounter a situa-

1 Thus, e.g., Gregor Schoeler has in many publications – see especially *Genesis* and *Oral* – analysed the transmission of texts from this historical point of view. Also Stefan Leder's studies (Authorship), and (Features), take historical *akhbār* and *ḥadīth*s as their starting point.

2 E.g., Marzolph, *Arabia Ridens*.

3 E.g., Malti-Douglas, *Structures*.

tion where several persons, many of them anonymous, have taken part in forming the final text, which may further exist in several versions with major differences.

The authorship of a large part of Arabic literary anecdotes before the tenth century is multilayered in the sense that the texts are the result of the work of multiple authors.[4] There are also stories by a single author, but these are probably in a minority – one example will be mentioned at the end of this paper. Single, individual authors are more common in philosophy, scholarly literature and literary letters.

It should be emphasized that having multiple authors does not mean that the text belongs to folklore. Arabic anecdotes were transmitted in learned circles, using a polished and literary Classical Arabic as their linguistic medium, and at least some of them are the product of a very conscious literary mind. In Arabic folklore, one does find traces of learned prose and elements derived from high literature, but the literary tradition seems to have benefited from folklore only sporadically.[5]

Many long anecdotes which circulated in Arabic literature from the eighth to the mid-tenth centuries exhibit clear indications that they were composed by a series of authors, each moulding the material on successive stages.[6] I will take my examples from among the anecdotes featuring Khālid ibn Ṣafwān (d. 135/752), as I have studied in depth this particular orator, wit, courtier and tribal leader of the Late Umayyad and Early ʿAb-

4 The multilayered authorship of Arabic anecdotes to some extent resembles the situation in modern internet literature where there have been attempts (mainly unsuccessful ones, though) to create a truly polyphonic work, authored by a large number of writers. Unfortunately, this often leads not only to polyphony, but to cacophony, too.

5 Cf., e.g., Hämeen-Anttila, "Oral." There are borderline cases, like that of the final Cairene redaction of the *Arabian Nights*, which even includes lengthy passages directly taken from learned books and inserted into the collection more or less as such without ever having become integral parts of the oral tradition.

6 In short anecdotes, the situation seems similar to that of longer anecdotes, but the brevity of the texts makes it difficult to follow the changes they have undergone and the probability of the text having been transmitted without major changes – i.e., that it only has a single author – is, obviously, the greater the simpler the text is.

bāsid periods.[7] What I am to say, however, should also be valid for other similar stories connected with characters of the Pre-Islamic, Umayyad or Early ʿAbbāsid periods, with the partial exception of major religious or political authorities.

In most long anecdotes, several authors have been involved in the process of producing the final text(s). We may identify four layers of persons who can claim a part in the formation of the final text(s):

1. The first is the protagonist of the story himself, most anecdotes claiming to be reports of real events, where an integral part of the story is often an oration, saying, or witticism, implied to be given in the *expressis verbis* of the protagonist, who is a historical person. Part(s) of such stories may, indeed, go back to a historical character, who may really have delivered some of the speeches attributed to him, or at least parts of them. Hence, he is the original author of the speech, or saying, that forms the core of the story, however much it may have been transformed during the process before the first – or better still: most archaic – version that has been preserved to us.[8]

The protagonist cannot in many cases be given any authorial credit. Stories may be completely devoid of historicity, though they mask themselves as historical (pseudo-historical stories). If the story is not authentic, the protagonist has no more to do with the genesis of the story than a historical character in a Shakespearean play. More probably than not, however, many stories contain a nucleus of "genuine" history, so that we have to allow the protagonist a role, even though perhaps only a minor one. His part in the story may be limited to a brief saying or the outlines

7 See Hämeen-Anttila, "Short stories," "Khālid: between history and literature," and, "Khālid: an orator." I am presently preparing a monograph on Khālid's speeches and stories about him.

8 It is vital to make a distinction between the first preserved version of a story and the oldest one. The date of the codifier (cf. below) basically has nothing to do with the date of the version he codifies. A late codifier may preserve an archaic version while an early codifier may have changed his version significantly.

of events around which stories and speeches have later been composed. The protagonist is usually not the main author.

To take an example, there is a witty and well-timed[9] quotation of the hemistich *saḥābatu ṣayfin ʿan qalīlin taqashshaʿū* by Khālid ibn Ṣafwān in a story about him and Bilāl ibn abī Burda.[10] The story exists in several versions, three of which can be found in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 7/1:56–7, 87, and (ed. al-ʿAẓm) 7:402, and they cannot be reduced to one original version: the events unfold differently, the motif of the protagonists' behaviour varies, while almost only this one saying remains intact.[11]

2. The second layer is formed by a chain of oral transmitters of the orations and the anecdotes. There is nothing to indicate that, e.g., Umayyad speeches would usually have been composed in writing or would have been taken down at the time of their oral delivery or even memorized immediately after, excepting, perhaps, the speeches of the most important political and religious characters, and even in their case I very much doubt the exact historicity of the speeches attributed to them. Many early speakers themselves were probably not literate – e.g., in the case of Khālid ibn Ṣafwān there is nothing in the corpus to imply he was – and there is no reason to assume that their speeches were devotedly memorized, especially when they were neither religious nor political authorities.

However, stories about them and their sayings and deeds were later written down. *Ergo*, they must have lived on for a while orally. The stories and speeches must have also undergone changes during this process of oral transmission, but I would presume that during the oral transmis-

9 Or badly-timed, depending on our perspective. As readers we enjoy the punch line which, according to some versions, led to Khālid's imprisonment or even his death.

10 I have discussed this particular story in Hämeen-Anttila, "Khālid: between history and literature," 239–42 (with full documentation).

11 Moreover, al-Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, 3:146, relates the same story but attributes it to Ibn Shubruma and Ṭāriq, instead of Khālid and Bilāl ibn abī Burda, but as our aim here is not to find historical facts, it is, in the final analysis, immaterial whether the words were originally spoken by Khālid or Ibn Shubruma.

sion these changes were mostly unconscious rather than deliberate: people kept in mind witty sayings, interesting stories, and extracts of speeches and probably believed they were transmitting them intact to the next generation. One should again emphasize that oral transmission does not make the stories ordinary folklore, as this was a learned form of transmission. This second layer had perhaps the least to give to the artistic and literary genesis of these stories.

3. The third layer is formed by anonymous authors who composed stories out of the elements transmitted to them. This layer of authors is distinguished from the previous one by their conscious elaboration of the stories. In many cases, we still have both simple and elaborate versions of the same story. In the version unedited by these conscious, although anonymous, authors the text may be simple and fragmentary, perhaps consisting of no more than a witty line by the protagonist and a most elementary setting for the incident. In the best of cases, we may even hope to have "authentic" material transmitted to us in a form untouched by later literary modifications. I put the word "authentic" in quotation marks, as we, of course, can never prove that a certain saying by the protagonist (first-layer author) would have been transmitted exactly as such. The best we can do is to show that a brief – and hence easily memorizable – saying is widely attested relatively early and does not contain any anachronistic elements.

In stories edited by anonymous authors, we often find several originally separate anecdotes merged together, a carefully elaborated literary structure and a very balanced and elegant use of language. When the story is well told and structurally complex, one cannot dismiss its creators as mere transmitters. Creating a long, *novella*-like anecdote out of brief sayings, jokes, and fragments of speeches needs more than mechanical transmission or gluing-together of elements of various provenances. In the case of these anonymous authors, we may at least sometimes speak of conscious creative work, not necessarily inferior to a *novella* by Boccac-

cio, although these authors did not leave us information about their names.

I call this third class "anonymous authors". They are anonymous as far as we do not know them by name, but they are not an anonymous mass. They are clearly individual authors.[12] It is probable that they worked in writing, but if so, their works have been lost. The *isnād*s in the stories rarely help us identify these authors. First of all, few anecdotes are provided with an *isnād* and, secondly, there does not seem to be any recurring names in the *isnād*s linked to the more complex stories, identifiable as authors responsible for the elaboration of the story.[13]

One might raise the question why I postulate such shadowy anonymous authors at all. In some cases, the earliest codifiers of the stories, my fourth layer of authors, may well be identical with these anonymous authors, but in others this is made improbable by the earliest written evidence, which I will discuss in the light of some examples below.

4. The fourth layer consists of early codifiers, or codifier-authors, such as al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), al-Masʿūdī, al-Bayhaqī (early fourth/tenth century), al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–9), and others in whose collections a story may be found for the first time in its complete form. The differences between the versions in various early sources show that the work of the anonymous authors of the third layer was not considered fixed and the early codifiers continued working on the received material. Although for brevity's sake I call them codifiers, this does not imply that their role was restricted to writing the stories down. On the contrary, most early codi-

12 Here we come to the phase of transmission where Schoeler's aural model of transmission is of great interest. However, it is not my aim to discuss Schoeler's theories in this paper. Note that in, e.g., the case of al-Madā'inī, it is very difficult to draw a clear boundary between literary and historical activities. For al-Madā'inī's transmission of historical material, see also Lindstedt in this volume.

13 The lack of an *isnād* system makes a major difference between literary and religious material, historical material coming somewhere between the two, although the borderline between history and literature is very vague, the same anecdote often serving both genres.

fiers seem to have edited, sometimes heavily, the texts they inserted into their collection, as can be seen when we compare all the versions of a story with each other: it rarely happens that versions are even close to being identical with each other and the changes are considerable and relate to the artistic structure of the story. These codifiers were also authors in their own right.

The stories as the codifiers received them have usually not survived, and we cannot exactly know what these codifiers did, but by comparing individual versions we can see that they considered the received text freely modifiable and were neither restricted by questions of copyright nor by historical accuracy. The same holds true in even clearly historical works but even more so in belles lettres: in general, authors of historical works, such as al-Balādhurī, tend to be more faithful transmitters than their colleagues compiling anecdotal *adab* works. One thing, however, seems rather certain. The authors rarely had a hidden political agenda, but they usually worked on aesthetic principles. Religious or historical texts, where one may find hidden agendas, have received more scholarly attention. In them, stories may be manipulated or invented in order to show the Umayyads in a bad light or the Shiite Imams may be made to accept the superiority of Abū Bakr over ʿAlī. No such obvious motives can be shown in the Khālid corpus, the majority of anecdotes dealing with non-political and non-religious issues and Khālid being too unimportant to become a bone of contention.

5. As a fifth layer we could add the written transmission in anthologies, but it seems that in the second millennium and even earlier the freedoms taken in transmitting received material were lessened, as one may see when studying, e.g., Ibn ʿAbdrabbih's (d. 328/940) *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* and its sources.[14] An anthologist did occasionally abbreviate the story and modify its details, but basically the freedom of the author was gone and

14 Cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen*. It goes without saying that the change was not abrupt and authors took different degrees of liberty with the stories they transmitted.

anecdotes were merely anthologized, taken as such from the original sources and set in a new context with often minimal or no changes. There seems to have been a sense of the Classical anecdote corpus having been closed. Little new material was added before Mamlūk times and the received material was transmitted more or less intact, except for the case of some authors like Ibn Ḥamdūn (d. 562/1166–7).

Now let us sum up the question from another point of view. Who is the author of the story we read in the preserved literature? The most obvious point is that in the majority of cases there are several authorial voices, both in the corpus as a whole and in an individual anecdote. Somewhere, buried deep under later layers we may still hope to hear the voice of the protagonist(s), mainly in brief sayings. Above it, we have the uncertain layer of oral transmitters who, perhaps, did little conscious alterations to the stories.

Above this layer, there comes the conscious literary recreation of the story in the hands of anonymous authors. The anonymous authors and the first codifiers are difficult to distinguish from each other and one might as well speak of a layer of several subsequent authors, the main difference being that the anonymous authors remained anonymous while their colleagues of a more literary period had their names attached to the stories. But the borderline is far from clear.

The fifth layer, the anthologists, should usually, in my opinion, no longer be considered authors in their own right, at least not when we speak of individual anecdotes. The changes they made to the text are minimal and their main role lies in arranging and rearranging the existent material. Many scholars have emphasized the importance of this organizing work in anthologies and the creativity needed in it, but I do not completely share their view. The anthologists did, sometimes, carefully consider a suitable place for each anecdote in a collection and the context of an anecdote obviously influences our reading of it, yet I hesitate to put

them on a par with what I would call authors proper. Moreover, many anthologists seem to have done their work rather mechanically.

Of the four layers of authors proper the first (the protagonist, often corresponding to a real historical character), the third (the anonymous author) and the fourth (the first codifier) are very often to be considered conscious authors, the protagonist especially when the story is built around a speech or a saying.[15] The second layer, the early oral, or semiliterate, transmitters, may better be considered transmitters only, like transmitters of the fifth layer.

Three Examples of Multilayered Authorship

Hitherto I have mainly restricted myself to a theoretical discussion of the question, but let us now consider three concrete examples to see how this model of multilayered authorship actually works.

Elsewhere, I have extensively discussed a long anecdote, four variants of which are found in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 7/1, and there are dozens of other attestations in other books.[16] The main constituents of the story are a speech, glorifying Southern Arabs, by Ibn Makhrama, the devastating but concise ridicule of the same by Khālid, given at the instigation of the Caliph al-Saffāḥ and, finally, a boast about the Northern Arabs by Khālid. To this basic structure some other elements have been added, such as a philological (and slightly obscene) joke on Southern Arabic dialects.

Some of the long versions of this story, attested in preserved books by known authors of the fourth layer, are artistic and well able to compete with the *novelle* of Italian literature. As, e.g., al-Balādhurī usually transmits material rather faithfully, we may assume that there was an earlier anonymous[17] author of the third layer.

15 The protagonist may, of course, also have told of his own actions, thus becoming, in fact, an oral transmitter as well.

16 Hämeen-Anttila, "Khālid: an orator," with full documentation. In al-Balādhurī, the versions are found on pp. 71, 77–79, 80, and 85.

17 Al-Balādhurī introduces the story in the main version by the simple *qālū* "they tell".

That this anonymous author created the story such as we know it, instead of only transmitting an old story going back to Khālid himself, is shown by the separate existence of some elements of the story. They are not fragments of the long story, in the sense that a longer story would have become fragmented and elements of it would have lived on in a shorter form. This is shown, e.g., by the changes in the protagonists. Hence, al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb* 7/1:71) narrates a part of the story as a discussion between Khālid and al-Ḥajjāj (d. 95/714) and it is hard to understand why Khālid's interlocutor should have been downgraded to a Governor, but the reverse upgrading is typical in anecdotes.[18] The anonymous author took various anecdotes about Khālid's life and compiled one continuous, lengthy narrative out of them.

The existence of the second layer, oral transmitters, cannot be proven, but it is only natural to presume that the originally independent stories were not put down in writing immediately after the incidents. That the incidents have any historicity behind them at all cannot, of course, be proven, as very few contemporary sources exist. Some of the elements may well be purely fictitious. What we can say, though, is that the core of the story, the witticism by Khālid ("How can he boast to Muḍar of people who ride asses, weave clothes, train monkeys and tan hides? A hoopoe led (Solomon) to them and a rat drowned them.") is attested in dozens of early sources and had very early on become part of believed history: the sources are unanimous that this was said by Khālid. The proliferation of early versions would indicate that the story circulated widely and, whether the witticism originally be by Khālid or someone else, must have been orally transmitted.

It would sound credible to me that Khālid, indeed, said something like this in some connection, but even if not, there was someone who invented this saying and it got wide circulation very early on. It is, in the final analysis, immaterial whether this person was Khālid ibn Ṣafwān or "Khālid ibn Ṣafwān", i.e., an anonymous person inventing a saying and putting it in Khālid's mouth.

18 Cf. Hämeen-Anttila, "Khālid: an orator."

As a second example we may take the long story about Khālid and Umm Salama, which we know from several almost contemporary authors of the tenth century, the most important being al-Masʿūdī and al-Bayhaqī, the two offering versions which share the same elements but radically differ from each other in, e.g., wording.[19] It is a very artistically constructed story where Khālid first describes the pleasures of polygamy to al-Saffāḥ. The Caliph's wife, Umm Salama, hears about this and sends men to beat Khālid up, although he is able to run to the safety of his house before his bones are broken. When again at court, Khālid wisely reverses his opinion by speaking against polygamy and the story ends with his being rewarded by Umm Salama.

The story is composed of originally independent elements. An early source, al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 7/1:59 (explicitly on al-Madāʾinī's authority), quotes a speech by Khālid against marriage in general, whether monogamy or polygamy, addressed to a rather obscure Ibn Ribāṭ al-Fuqaymī. Such an ascetic sermon is well in line with Khālid's known (or reported, to be on the safe side) asceticism and misogyny and the upgrading of the interlocutor (Ibn Ribāṭ > al-Saffāḥ) in later versions is typical. Also other parts of the story circulate independently in early sources, and often in a form that cannot derive from the long version, which is, if we base ourselves on the first attestations, moreover much younger. Thus, e.g., al-Balādhurī, again on the authority of al-Madāʾinī, transmits a speech by Khālid on ideal women (*Ansāb* 7/1:61) but with no reference to either polygamy or monogamy. Last but not least, there is a *ḥadīth* on the Prophet Muḥammad and his wife Umm Salama[20] which has basically the same structure as the story about Khālid and al-Saffāḥ's wife Umm Salama, and is quite clearly used as its intertext.

Hence, we can show that several of the elements of the long story circulated separately by the mid-9th century. The long story surfaces a century later in several different versions, which contain the same elements but use them differently, thus showing the influence of early codifier-au-

19 See Hämeen-Anttila, "Short stories," with an analysis and full documentation.

20 E.g., al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 4913 (cognate to no. 5191).

thors. These versions cannot have been born independently from the same separate elements, but the elements must have been joined together by one creative author, who decided to combine certain elements into one story. This anonymous author must have worked before al-Bayhaqī and al-Masʿūdī, who already use his story, and he may well have been later than al-Balādhurī, though not necessarily so – al-Balādhurī may have quoted material taken from al-Madāʾinī, ignoring a longer story developed already by his time from the same elements.[21]

The third example I will discuss more extensively and with full documentation, as it has not been discussed in detail before. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 7/1:60, gives the oldest version on the authority of a "*qāla*", which in this case seems to refer back to the authority of the previous anecdote, al-Madāʾinī:

> He (al-Madāʾinī) said: Once Khālid went on a pilgrimage and left his son Ribʿī in charge of his property. By the time he was back Ribʿī had spent a considerable sum. Khālid said: "I put Ribʿī in charge of my property, and, by God, he was quicker in it than moths are in wool in summer (*asraʿu min al-sūsi fī l-ṣūfi fī l-ṣayfi*)!"

There are other versions of the story which seems to have enjoyed wide circulation, viz.:

> Someone asked Khālid ibn Ṣafwān: "How is your son?" He replied: "He is the lord of the young men of his people in both wit and *adab*." He was asked: "How much do you give him a month?" Khālid replied: "Thirty dirhams." The other said: "What can he do with a mere thirty dirhams! Why don't you give him more? Your income is thirty thousand!" Khālid replied: "The thirty dirhams are quicker to destroy my property than are moths in wool in summer!"

21 Theoretically, one of the codifier-authors could have created the story (and hence be identical with the third-layer anonymous author) but this is made improbable by the temporal proximity of the authors and their immediate successors: the long combined story was already in wide circulation when we first come across it.

When Khālid's words were related to him al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said: "I stand witness that Khālid is a trueborn Tamīmī!"
(Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Durra* 35. Other attestations: al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* i, 149;[22] al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār* 679;[23] Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamhara* i, 201;[24] al-Ābī, *Nathr* iii, 290;[25] Ibn Durayd, *Jamhara* 83;[26] al-Zamakhsharī, *Mustaqṣā* i, 6.)

Another short piece of lexical inspiration is also attached to the story in some versions:[27]

ākal min al-sūs: It is told that Khālid ibn Ṣafwān said to his son Ribʿī: "Oh my son, you are quicker to squander and destroy my property than are moths in wool in summer! By God, you will not prosper this year, nor the next (*qāb*) nor the one after that (*qubāqib*)!" – This is like when you say: "You will not prosper today, nor tomorrow nor the day after that."
(al-Qālī, *Afʿal*, 22. Parallels for the latter, lexical part (mostly without mentioning Khālid's name): Ibn ʿAbbād, *Muḥīṭ,* 5:215, 430 (here only *al-ʿām – qābil – qabāʾil*); Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān,* 11:8 (s.v. QBB);[28] Ibn Du-

22 Al-Maydānī adds the explanation "al-Ḥasan said this because the Tamīmīs are known for their avarice and greed."

23 Only Khālid's last phrase is transmitted in the *Thimār*. Al-Thaʿālibī tacitly changes *al-thalāthūn* to *la-thalāthūn*, as he does not give the preceding discussion which legitimizes the determined article. Al-Thaʿālibī deems this to be the most eloquent among comparisons with moths.

24 Abbreviated, but the basic elements (the allowance of an anonymous son plus the proverb) are there.

25 Abbreviated, as in Abū Hilāl, but using the expression *la-aʿbath for la-asraʿ* against all other versions.

26 Ibn Durayd narrates this as something said by an anonymous Bedouin about his son's one *dānaq* daily allowance. That the versions are interdependent is shown by the presence of the two key elements, the allowance of a son and the proverb, though here Bedouinized to "*al-ʿuthth fī l-ṣūf fī l-ṣayf*".

27 I am borrowing the term from Blachère's (*Histoire* 3:530) famous, but perhaps somewhat unjust, description of some Basran and Kufan poets.

28 The lexicographical tradition gives the respective names of the years usually in the sequence *al-ʿām – qābil – qābb – qubāqib – muqabqib*. This seems to contain some fantastical formations of the lexicographers. Ibn Manẓūr also adds (from Ibn Sīda)

rayd, *Jamhara,* 176 and 1212; al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb,* 8:299; al-Ṣaghānī, *Takmila,* 1:234; *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* 5:29; al-Fīrūzābādī, *Qāmūs,* s.v. QBB; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj,* 3:512; al-Balawī, *Alif-bāʾ,* 2:436. See also Kraemer, "Legajo-Studien," 281, note 1.)

The saying *asraʿu min al-sūs(i fī l-ṣūfi fī l-ṣayf)* is also found as an anonymous proverb (e.g., *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, 2:231–2; al-Ābī, *Nathr*, 6:192; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ*, 2:462[29]).[30] Whether Khālid originated this proverb, cannot be said, but, according to our evidence, it was he who made it popular. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Mustaqṣā,* 1:6, attributes the saying to him.

A further version may be found in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb*, 7/1:82, viz.:

> They say: People said to Khālid about his son: "You own (*yaduka tashtamilu*)[31] more than thirty thousand (dirhams), yet you give your son just a dirham a day. He is at his wit's end, as you know." Khālid replied: "Two *dānaq*s for his bread, two for a chicken, and two for fruit. That is a proper[32] diet."

One notices three elements which have been differently combined in these stories and versions, viz.

1. the allowance to Khālid's son,
2. the proverb *ākal/asraʿ* etc.,
3. a functionally similar lexicographical list of year names.

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al-Aṣmaʿī as the authority of this story and lets him add: "They (the Arabs) do not know anything past this", i.e., any word denoting further years in the future.

29 Here *afsad*, instead of *asraʿ*.

30 Abū Bakr al-Khwārizmī (*apud* al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīma,* 4:203) embellished this to blame a Governor (*ʿāmil*): "a moth in silk in summer time is merely a well-doer in comparison to him." Abū l-Qāsim al-Wāsānī (*apud* al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīma,* 1:342) inserted this in one of his poems. Similar expressions are also widely found in literature, e.g., al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 317–8 (*inna l-karama asraʿu fī l-māli min al-sūs = Rasāʾil* 394), al-Jurjānī, *Muntakhab,* 409 (*al-ʿiyāl sūs al-māl*). These are far too numerous to be listed.

31 Other versions have *tastaghillu* which may be a better reading.

32 Or "pious" (*ṣāliḥ*).

The versions either mention the son's name or not, and other elements have been added to some of the versions (Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's comment; Khālid's miserly advice as how to survive on a shoestring budget of a dirham a day). The theme of all the stories is Khālid's miserliness towards his son.

As the text is very short, we cannot clearly distinguish between the various authorial layers. The first, the protagonist, is there and there is no reason to doubt the historicity of the saying about moths or, at least, its early circulation in connection with Khālid's name. The second layer, the oral transmitters, could easily be responsible for the wide variation in this story, which would fit well with the general characteristics of oral lore. The third layer, that of anonymous authors, is perhaps unnecessary to postulate in this case, as the final formulations do not show any signs of a strong creative authorship. The text is brief and witty but nothing more than that. The fourth layer, the first codifiers, is of course there, as that is the *sine qua non* for the preservation of any text.

From a practical point of view such texts are cumbersome for the literary historian. They are hard to date. Should we date Ibn Ḥamdūn's (d. 562/1166–7) version of the Ibn Makhrama story in his *Tadhkira* 3:411–3 (no. 1102), to the mid-12th century, although it does resemble an earlier version codified by al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), itself probably, but not necessarily,[33] deriving from al-Madā'inī (d. 228/842–3), possibly, but again not necessarily, in a faithful fashion? Should we date it to al-Balādhurī's or al-Madā'inī's times? But most probably neither of the two invented the stories they codified. On the other hand, it would be credulous to call the speeches of Khālid specimens of mid-8th-century prose, as many of them hardly existed as such at that time and if they did, they were certainly not exactly in their present form.

33 Al-Balādhurī uses *isnād*s only intermittently, favouring the anonymous *qāla* series, which may, or may not, refer to the authority quoted for the previous anecdote. Al-Balādhurī is untypically profuse with his *isnād*s, obviously considering himself a historian. In most *adab* books, *isnād*s are even rarer.

But to ignore this literature would mean to ignore a major part of pre-tenth-century Arabic prose – and when we remember that similar problems are also found in connection with, e.g., Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's (d. 139/756?) translations, the early history of Arabic literary prose would be in danger of vanishing away, which again would misrepresent the situation.

There is no simple solution to these problems. In the case of long anecdotes, and probably short ones, too, we have to live with this uncertainty of dating. It seems best to think in terms of genres and to analyse texts as products of a process that in some cases may have taken centuries. What we may describe in a history of Arabic prose is the early anecdotal literature as such, in a group bringing together stories, versions and elements from more than two centuries into a sometimes unanalysable whole. The earliest date we can give to a story is, of course, its earliest attestation, with sometimes a possibility of speculating on the immediate source of this, as in the case of al-Balādhurī, who probably transmitted Khālid material rather faithfully from al-Madāʾinī. To go back earlier than al-Madāʾinī is difficult, so this Khālid material has to be dated vaguely to a period covering almost a century. It can be used to analyse the prose style of the early 8th to the early 9th centuries, but in the case of, e.g., the material first attested in al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*, we already have a span of two centuries.

The majority of pre-tenth-century specimens of literary prose are results of multilayered authorship. Later, literary prose texts by a single author became more common, as in the *maqāma*s of al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008), where the plot of the story is often taken from the anecdotal corpus, but the final product is freely rewritten, so that there is no more reason to speak of multilayered authorship in al-Hamadhānī's *maqāma*s as there would be in Shakespeare's plays.[34] Al-Hamadhānī's sources may in some cases be located in earlier literature, but his *maqāma*s cannot be called mere versions of these earlier anecdotes.[35]

34 I make this comparison on purpose: as Shakespeare took his plots from earlier literature there is *some* reason to suggest something similar also in his case.

35 For al-Hamadhānī's sources, see Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama,* 62–98.

Al-Jāḥiẓ and a Single-Author Text

Let me conclude with a brief note on one early single-author text, al-Jāḥiẓ's *Mufākharat al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*. This charming text is one of the earliest preserved Arabic *munāẓara*s, or literary debates.[36] It does have elements of multilayered authorship as it largely consists of quotations of poetry and prose, yet I prefer to consider it a single-author text, as the structure of the story is a creation by al-Jāḥiẓ and only by him: no other authorial hand has taken part in the construction of the main story line. It, like many of his other *risāla*s, also differs from his longer works which come closer to being anthologies – well-structured ones, though.[37] Why I select this particular text as an example is that it also exhibits an interesting merger of the authorial voice with one of the protagonists. The text is a debate between the Lover of Boys and the Lover of Girls. What distinguishes it from ordinary *munāẓara*s and makes it interesting from the point of view of authorship is that the voice of the author finally merges with that of the Lover of Girls. The author often voices his opinion at the end of a *munāẓara*, but in al-Jāḥiẓ's text it is technically one of the protagonists, the Lover of Girls, not the author, who starts speaking about "our book" (*Rasā'il*, 2:123) and addressing the reader.

This final merger of voices throws an interesting light on the whole story, beginning as it does as a seemingly impartial debate between two fictional characters and ending up in showing the author coalesce with one of his characters. But I will leave this aspect to another time. What concerns us here is that the text, considered as a whole, is, despite its anthological nature, basically a single-author text. We know that it was al-Jāḥiẓ, and al-Jāḥiẓ only, who created the structure of the text and selected the anecdotes and verses to be quoted in it, perhaps working in a fashion not much different from that of our anonymous authors of the third layer. On the level of the quoted anecdotes, though, we come back to multilayered authorship.

36 On the definition of the genre, see Hämeen-Anttila, "Khālid: an orator."

37 Especially James Montgomery has in several recent articles (James E. Montgomery, *al-Jāḥiẓ*) emphasized the necessity of reading the material of al-Jāḥiẓ in its full context.

As will have been noticed, the multiplicity of authors is partly related to the question of the historicity of the anecdotes. When the anecdotes base themselves on historical events, a certain element of multiple authors immediately comes into the picture, as there is both a historical protagonist and a later author manipulating him. In a modern historical novel the situation is different, as the bulk of the text is created by the modern author and sometimes the plot and the speeches have nothing whatsoever to do with the real historical person: the whole novel may be the product of a single modern author's imagination. In the case of the anecdotes, the bulk of the text may, on the contrary, be a speech by the protagonist, known from earlier sources to go down, if not to the protagonist himself, at least to the level of some generations earlier than the known author.

A story of multilayered authorship is not necessarily polyphonic. While a polyphonic text is a text which speaks with a variety of tongues, as it were,[38] in the text with multiple authors there is often only one final voice, that of the last author, who has appropriated the work of his predecessors and moulded the text to his liking. The multiplicity of voices is synchronic and horizontal in the case of polyphonic texts, but diachronic and vertical in stories of multilayered authorship. Naturally, though, some texts may both be polyphonic and of multilayered authorship.

What difference does it make, finally, whether we have a single author or multiple authors? From the point of view of the literary analysis of the final text it does not, perhaps, matter, but for a literary historian it does. Writing the history of early Arabic literary prose is a complicated project, partly because of the fact that we have plenty of material claiming to date from the early periods while, in fact, being later reworkings of earlier material, but next to no material that can confidently be dated to the early periods as such. This may be one of the reasons we have no comprehensive study of early Arabic prose as yet. However, to understand the development of Arabic prose, one should tackle the question of multiauthored prose and, through meticulous analysis, try to uncover the au-

38 For polyphony in literature, see introduction.

thorial layers in the texts to be able to follow the development of the anecdotes and, through them, the development of narrative structures and style in early Arabic literature. The task is not easy, but it is challenging.

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The objective of the contributions presented in this volume is the investigation of authorship in pre-modern Arabic texts. From several angles and different perspectives it has been asked how the author in his various facets and aspects, and as a principle of organization and guidance, can be traced and understood. The author can be perceived as a historical individual, a singular genius, or a gifted anthologist; he can claim authority or pass it on to others. The author can be invisible, applying textual strategies for steering the reader's perception and interpretation, trying to leave the reader oblivious to his authorial interference. Although authors can be proud to present their knowledge and their opinions, they can also be reluctant to show themselves and can even disclaim their responsibility, depending on the issue at hand.

The contributions gathered in this volume provide a fresh view on the multilayered nature of authorial functions and open up new perspectives on our understanding of the rich and diverse pre-modern Arabic culture and literature.

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